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### **Beginning the Discussion on Priorities - School Construction/Renovation or County Owned Rent Control Housing?**

At yesterday's Board of Supervisors' meeting, I proposed redirecting developers' \$3 per square foot contribution for buying rent-controlled housing units into a trust fund to pay for public school renovation and construction. This proposal would have resulted in millions of dollars being used to fund our critical needs of school construction and renovations. Unfortunately, my proposal failed on an 8-2 vote with myself and Supervisor Michael Frey supporting it. While I am disappointed that it did not pass, I

am encouraged that many of my colleagues on the Board agreed that we should have a conversation regarding County spending priorities. There is a proposal making its way through staff that would require contributions per square foot for all non-residential development for the purchase of rent controlled subsidized housing County-wide that will provide a forum for these discussions.

Since taking office in 2008, I have been an advocate for addressing our school construction and renovation needs. For instance, I was the first to propose raising the school bond limit to \$155M, where it is today. As *Herrity Report* readers are aware, I have proposed several innovative solutions to address some of FCPS's capital improvement needs ([see here](#)) and this is another such proposal. In addition to school capital requirements we also have significant county capital improvements that will compete for our scarce capital dollars. I am looking forward to engaging in a discussion over our priorities for developer contributions and whether they should go toward funding for school construction and renovation, or the purchase of more rent-controlled housing units.

FCPS's current capital needs are over \$870 million for the next five years, and nearly \$1.8 billion over the next ten years. The current bond capacity granted to FCPS, \$155 million per year, is insufficient to meet this need. However, it would be very dangerous to our financial health to increase this capacity as some have suggested. There are other creative ways to meet this need and we should pursue them, but they will not completely close the gap. For me it is clear that using these funds to close the gap outweighs the purchase of additional rent control units in terms of priorities.

At the same time as our school renovation and construction need has ballooned into billions of dollars, the number of rent-controlled units on the county has also grown significantly:

- Today, there are more people in subsidized housing units in Fairfax County than in the entire Town of Vienna. There are also more people in County subsidized housing than in 15 cities, 39 counties, and 186 towns in Virginia.
- From 2004-2013 the number of units owned by the Redevelopment and Housing Authority has increased 43% (2,626 to 3,758). As a result the Fairfax County government is one of the largest landlords in the County.
- From 2005-2013 the proportion of subsidized housing units to non-subsidized housing units increased by 32%. In other words, the volume of subsidized housing units is growing much quicker than the volume of non-subsidized housing units.
- From 2007-2013 the percentage of the population living in subsidized housing units increased by 25% (14,908-18,649). Simply put, in the last 5 years the number of people in subsidized housing grew 150% faster than our overall population.

These numbers do not include any of the recently approved additions to these numbers - a 20% rent-controlled housing requirement in Tysons along with a \$3 per square foot non-residential contribution to subsidized housing, the mandate for 80% of all RSUs to be rent-controlled as discussed below, the Residences at the Government Center, and

many other projects in the works. While I firmly believe in and support projects that provide housing for those that cannot provide for themselves - the disabled, the homeless, the elderly - I do not and cannot support subsidized rent-controlled housing for people that have reasonably viable housing options. As you can tell from the statistics above, the growth in subsidized rent-controlled housing in Fairfax County has been staggering over the last several years. There is no answer when I ask - how much is enough?

With many competing priorities and dwindling financial resources, the Board needs to have a serious discussion about what our priorities are, where they fall in relation to each other and how we move forward to address these pressing issues. Because resources are scarce, we cannot fund everything as we would like and need to make tough decisions on what our priorities are. I am of the belief that meeting our critical infrastructure needs, especially those of our public schools, will bring us a much bigger return on our investment than continuing to amass a stock of County-owned and rent-controlled housing units, especially for people that have other housing options.

### **Board Votes to Encourage Amendment of Residential Studio Units Ordinance**

Since the RSU ordinance was first proposed, I have been leading the effort to keep the RSUs out of suburban neighborhoods. At Tuesday's Board of Supervisors' meeting the Board took the first step in preserving the character of our suburban communities when they voted to endorse the idea of restricting any RSU development to higher density neighborhoods, and to make the Planning Commission aware of such an endorsement - a position that I have been advocating for and outlined in my last newsletter here - [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/pdf\\_files/herrity\\_report/october\\_2013.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/pdf_files/herrity_report/october_2013.pdf)

This is a critical first step in fixing this ordinance, but there is still more work to be done, such as to change the rent control requirements still in the ordinance and the maximum number of units. Eighty percent of these high-density units would be subject to rent controls levels that are set so low that they would be off limits to those making more than \$45,000 per year. This means our first year policemen, firemen, teachers and most other young professionals would be ineligible for the units because they make more than \$45,000 per year - the very people these type of units were suggested to be for.

I will be co-hosting a Town Hall Meeting on the RSU ordinance with the Springfield District Council tonight, December 4th at 7:30pm, at the West Springfield Governmental Center, 6140 Rolling Road, Springfield, 22152. Please come out so I can hear from you on this important proposal.

Much controversy has been caused by the proposed new zoning ordinance for Residential Studio Units (RSUs). RSUs are efficiency or studio apartments that cannot

be more than 500 square feet of gross floor area, inclusive of an in-unit bathroom and kitchen. The RSU ordinance as currently proposed would allow the development of this type of multifamily housing in the County's low density residential neighborhoods together with the increased density (up to 75 units) and all of the problems they bring. It would also allow the conversion of single family homes to multiple RSUs - essentially legalizing boarding houses in our suburban neighborhoods.

Suburban neighborhoods are at the heart of what makes Fairfax County great. It is these vibrant neighborhoods, which have attracted people and companies to move here and have made Fairfax County a great place to live, grow a business and raise a family. It is of the utmost importance that we preserve their character and not allow them to be a breeding ground for absentee landlords, boarding houses and overcrowding. With this measure, I believe, we have taken the first steps in stopping RSUs from changing the very fabric of these communities.

### **Progress on Long Term Fix for Congestion on I-66**

The next step in a long term solution for congestion on I-66 was taken last month as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a record of decision on the 25-mile Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Interstate 66 from the Capital Beltway to Haymarket. This clears the way for the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to select one or more of the final ten concepts for more detailed analysis. In addition there were almost 20 responses from the private sector with solutions for I-66 congestion received by VDOT in response to their RFI.

With this EIS complete we have an opportunity to build on the success of the I-495 Express lanes, leverage the private sector and provide quick relief to the almost 24 - 7 congestion on I-66. An "Express Lanes" like solution would also open this corridor up to reliable time advantaged mass transit and carpooling, extend a growing network of lanes dedicated to mass transit and carpools and ease congestion on I-66 and surrounding roads. This is the solution I am actively supporting and advocating for.

I have been a longtime advocate for improving I-66, one of my first actions as an elected official in January 2008 was to ask the Board of Supervisors request VDOT revive the I-66 Environmental Impact Study (EIS) which had been put on hold indefinitely. Restarting the study was one of the first actions Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton took when he became Secretary in 2009.

I would like to thank Governor Bob McDonnell and Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton for their continued leadership and commitment to bring real, timely solutions to address I-66 congestion. They have made fixing I-66 a top priority.

More information on the study is available here -

[http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/projects/northernvirginia/i66\\_eis.asp](http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/projects/northernvirginia/i66_eis.asp)

### **Have You Considered Adoption?**

November was National Adoption Awareness Month, and as an adoptive parent this issue is close to my heart. When the opportunity to adopt our 9 year old daughter in 2002 arose, it was probably the last thing my wife Nancy and I thought we would be doing that summer. That is the purpose of National Adoption Awareness Month, to raise awareness of the need and the positive impact it can have on a life.

When foster children turn 18, they age out of the system; leaving them with little help and few resources as they transition into adulthood. 'Aging out' means they do not have a stable place to call home for the holidays, no one to walk them down the aisle, or be there when they have families of their own. Statistics show that children who age out of the foster care system without being adopted are less likely to finish high school, much less likely to start or finish college, less likely to have stable housing, more likely to commit crimes, and more likely to have a child out of wedlock. It is truly saddening that for every 100 kids who age out of foster care, 54 become homeless, and 94 will not graduate from college.

The statistics above are shocking, and it is hard to imagine where our daughter would be today without the guidance all young women need as they go through high school, and the challenges of applying and getting in to college; without people (and our pets!) to call family, people to trust and confide in, and to love. It is not often you are presented with the opportunity to have such a meaningful and significant impact on a life, and I am glad we embraced the opportunity when it arose.

In July of this year Governor McDonnell initiated the "Campaign for 1,000", an effort to match 1,000 adoptive families to 1,000 children in foster care. In support of that goal the General Assembly approved \$1.5 million in this year's budget for this effort and to provide post-adoption support for adoptive parents and children. Support services include: access to staff specializing in adoption records, assistance with adoption searches, help with the legal finalization of adoption, and much more.

Thanks to the Governor's initiative more than 880 children who were eligible for adoption have been either adopted or matched to families knowledgeable of the child's needs and committed to follow through to adopt. Included in this number are 16 of the 20 longest waiting youth, one of which was in the foster care system for 16 years and was waiting for an adoptive family for the past 14 years.

I urge all readers to look into adoption and see if it is for them - there are many many children out there who need your help and can benefit from a loving home. It is my hope that we can reach the Governor's goal of matching 1,000 kids to 1,000 families by the end of his term, and can continue to give kids a shot at life and a loving home well into the future!

If you are interested in adopting out of Virginia's Foster Care System, please visit [www.VirginiaAdopts.Virginia.Gov](http://www.VirginiaAdopts.Virginia.Gov) or call Virginia's Adoption Hotline at 800-DO-ADOPT.